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The Early History of Bengal

BY

R. C. MAJUMDAR, M.A., Ph. D.

Professor of History in the University of Dacca

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF BENGAL.

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The earliest references to Bengal or parts of it are contained in comparatively later Vedic literature. In Atharva-Veda Saṁhitā occurs a verse wherein the author solemnly prays that the fever which was harassing the Aryans might be driven away to seek shelter among the Magadhas and the Aṅgas.[1] Similarly Puṇḍra is said to be the home of Dasyus in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa[2] and Vaṅga is referred to in a contemptuous manner in the Aitareya-Āraṇyaka.[3] According to Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra,[4] any one visiting the countries of the Puṇḍras, Vaṅgas and Kaliṅgas had to perform some sacrifices in order to expiate their sin.

Two important conclusions follow from the above statements. In the first place it is quite clear that the people of this province were originally different from the Aryans who composed the Vedic literature. The absence of any reference to them in Ṛigveda seems to show that they were unknown or at least not well known to the Aryans during the early period of their settlement in the Panjab. The references in the Atharva Saṁhitā, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Aitareya Āraṇyaka and Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra, among others, however, conclusively prove that throughout the post-Ṛigvedic period represented by the different stages of Vedic literature, the people of this province were known to the Aryans and gradually the latter were coming into contact with them, although Bengal or at least the greater part of it was outside

1. V. 22., 14. The name *Vaṅga* occurs in the Atharva Veda Pariśishṭa but it is considered by scholars to be a rather late work.

2. VII—18.

3. Keith, p. 200.

4. 1, 2, 14.

the sphere of Aryan culture for a long time. This is also proved by the famous legend of Māthava in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, according to which the sacred fire, the symbol of Aryan culture, started eastward from the borders of the Panjab, but stopped on the banks of the Sadānīrā river in Oudh.[1] It is further corroborated by a passage in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa referred to hereinafter, and the statement quoted above from Baudhāyana Sūtra shows that the state of things had not changed much even in the Sūtra period.

Secondly, the above passages clearly prove that Bengal was settled at an early period by a number of different tribes, for they contain references to the people called Puṇḍras, Vaṅgas, Aṅgas, and Kaliṅgas. The various parts of the province settled by these different tribes were called after them till a considerably late period and there is a legend in many Purāṇas explaining their origin. According to this legend, the famous Asura Bali, who was decoyed by Vishṇu in His Vāmana incarnation, was born as the son of an eastern king Hema. As he had no children, five sons were born of his wife, according to *kshetraja* rite, by her union with a ṛishi called Dīrghatamā. These five sons were called Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Suhma and Puṇḍra and the five provinces were named after them.[2]

This story deserves more than a passing notice. In the first place it records the general belief, held in the epic and Puranic age, that Bengal and Orissa were settled by different but closely allied tribes. Secondly, it indirectly admits the preponderance of non-Aryan blood in these tribes, inasmuch as Bali, the father of the five eponymous princes, is expressly said to be an Asura incarnate as man. Thirdly, we have in the legend the epic and Puranic tradition that there were settled governments in Bengal, and that her people came within the sphere of Aryan culture, long before the events described in Rāmāyaṇa

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1. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 1, 4, 1, 10 ff. S. B. E. Vol. XII, pp. 104 ff. The identification of the Sadānīrā which was the boundary between the Kosalas and the Videhas is beset with difficulties. Amarakosha gives it as a synonym of the Karatoyā, but in earlier texts Karatoyā is distinguished from Sadānīrā. Weber's identification with Gaṇḍakī is generally accepted, although Mahābhārata distinguishes it from the Sadānīrā. (cf. Vedic Index, *s. v.*)

2. Matsya P. ch. 48 vv. 77 ff., Vāyu P. ch. 99, vv. 85 ff.

and Mahābhārata. For according to Mahābhārata,[1] Ariha a remote ancestor of Dushyanta married an Aṅga princess and the genealogy furnished in Vāyu Purāṇa, which substantially agrees with that of the Matsya Purāṇa, places Lomapāda, a contemporary of Daśaratha as sixth, and the celebrated Karṇa as seventeenth in descent from Aṅga.[2]

Indeed it is quite clear that Aṅga in the extreme western part of Bengal imbibed Aryan civilisation at an early date and the stanzas on the liberality of Aṅga, in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa[3], show that the Aryanisation of the land had already commenced. For Aṅga is said to have been inaugurated by Udamaya, the son of Atri, and he went conquering everywhere over the whole earth, up to its ends, and sacrificed the sacrificial horse. That this Aṅga was no other than the eponymous hero referred to in the Purāṇas appears quite clearly from the fact that the same stanzas refer to the charity of the 'son of Virochana', which is another appellation of Bali, the father of Aṅga.

That Aṅga was Aryanised at an earlier date than the other parts of Bengal is also proved by the statements in Baudhāyana Sūtra, according to which the inhabitants of Aṅga were of mixed origin, while, as already stated above, the Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas, and Puṇḍras were so far removed from the pale of Aryan civilisation that any Aryan visiting their countries had to perform some expiatory sacrifices[4].

As the composition of Aitareya Brāhmaṇa can hardly be placed later than 800 B. C, it is quite clear that the Aryan settlements in the western extremity of Bengal had commenced long before that date. The year 1000 B. C. may therefore be taken, on a rough estimate, to be the dividing line between the Pre-Aryan and Post-Aryan history of Bengal, the word Aryan being taken to denote the race of men who composed the Vedic literature.

There has been a great deal of speculation as to the ethnic character of the people who dwelt in Bengal in the pre-Aryan period. Oldenberg held[5] that there were two great waves of Aryan immigration. The first band of Aryans had already pushed forward to the

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1. Ādi Parva, ch. 99—v. 19. (Calcutta Edition)
2. Op. Cit.
3. VIII. 22.
4. I, 2., 13 ff.
5. Buddha—First Excursus.

eastern countries including Bengal, when a second band, far more intellectually gifted than their brothers, and the authors of the Vedic hymns, entered the Panjab. This theory was adopted with some modifications by Hoernle and Grierson. A later theory, started by Mr. Ramaprasad Chanda[1] just reverses this position. In his opinion the Aryans who settled in Bengal represent a later wave of immigration. They found their way to the Gangetic plain across the Tableland of Central India and formed an outer ring round the hymn-composing Aryans who had occupied the upper valley of the Ganges and Jumna. All these scholars agree that the people of Bengal were Aryans though of a different stock from those who composed the Vedic hymns, but they differ as to the priority of one over the other in point of the period of immigration into India.

Quite a different opinion is held by other scholars. Sir Herbert Risley regarded the Bengali type "as a blend of Dravidian and Mongoloid elements with a strain of Indo-Aryan blood in the higher groups"[2]. In other words, the original people of Bengal, according to this theory, were composed of Dravidian and Mongolian elements, and there was a small admixture of Aryan blood in comparatively recent times. Mr. Pargiter holds a similar view. In his opinion the different people now inhabiting Bengal and Orissa constituted a closely connected ethnic group different from the Aryans, and they probably invaded India from the sea, settling first along the west and north coast of the Bay of Bengal, and gradually pushed inwards up the Ganges valley."[3]

These different theories, to which others might be easily added, show the great uncertainty of our knowledge regarding the origin of the Bengalis, and the time when and the manner in which they came to occupy this province. It is easy to criticise these theories and to point out their defects, but it is more difficult, in the present state of our knowledge, to substitute one that is entirely satisfactory, or very nearly so.

Leaving aside this task for the ethnologists we may next proceed to consider the early history of Bengal.

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1. Indo-Aryan race.
2. The Census of India vol. 1., Cambridge History vol. I, p. 47.
3. J. R. A. S. 1908, p. 852.

The tribal divisions of Bengal mentioned in the Puranic legend are also referred to in Mahābhārata in connection with the eastern expedition of Bhīma, for he is said to have defeated Karṇa, the king of Aṅga, Vasudeva, king of Puṇḍra, Samudrasena, king of Vaṅga and an unnamed king of the Suhmas.

It is, however, quite clear from the descriptions of Bhīma's conquests that the province of Bengal contained other political and racial units in addition to the Aṅgas, Vaṅgas, Suhmas and Puṇḍras. Thus Prasuhmas are mentioned along with the Suhmas and they seem to have been but two divisions of the original Suhma clan. We hear of a new kingdom on the banks of the Kauśikī (Kośi), a second with Modagiri, the modern Monghyr, as the capital, and two others at Tāmralipti and Karbaṭa. Besides these there were the Kirātas and Mlechchhas living on the sea coast as well as in the islands of the Bay[1].

According to the tradition preserved in the Mahābhārata there were these nine separate kingdoms in Bengal, fringed by the settlements of the Kirātas and other barbarian tribes. The fact that Aṅga is said to be the eldest of the five eponymous princes and that the Purāṇas have preserved a regular genealogy of the kings of this province whereas they are silent about that of the other states, seem to indicate that the Aṅgas were the most renowned of the five tribes. This is corroborated not only by the stanzas in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa quoted above but also by the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. In the former Aṅga is described as having conquered the whole earth and Lomapāda or Romapāda, the king of Aṅga, is twice referred to as a famous and powerful king [2]. We learn from the other epic that Jarāsandha had established an empire in eastern India and whereas Vaṅga and Puṇḍra were subject to the Magadhan king, Aṅga was on terms of alliance with him. Again, when Jarāsandha was killed and his empire fell to pieces, the Aṅgas, Vaṅgas, Puṇḍras, Kaliṅgas and other nations in Eastern India 'stood apart under the hegemony of Karṇa, king of Aṅga.' Karṇa was the trusted adviser of Duryodhana and played an important part in the series of events leading to the great war. He was looked upon by friends and foes alike as a great power and brought to the aid of the Kauravas not only his own troops but those of the Vaṅgas,

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1. Sabhā Parva ch 30. (Calcutta edition)
2. I. 9. 13. (Calcutta edition)

Kaliṅgas and the many Mlechchha kings who were his vassals [1]. In one passage of Mahābhārata Aṅga and Vaṅga are expressly said to have formed one dominion and Kathā-sarit-sāgara preserves a tradition that Aṅga at one time extended to the sea, for one of its cities Viṭaṅkapura is said to have been situated on the sea-side [2].

The epic and Puranic traditions about the greatness of Aṅga are fully corroborated by the Buddhist literature. Thus Aṅga heads the list of sixteen great countries in India frequently mentioned in Aṅguttara Nikāya[3]. In a passage in Mahā-Govinda-Suttanta Champā, the city of the Aṅgas, is mentioned among the seven famous cities of India [4]. Again, while Buddha proposed to enter into Mahānirvāṇa at Kusinagara, Ānanda exclaimed ; 'Let not the Mahānirvāṇa of the Blessed One take place at this third rate city. There are great cities such as Champā, Rājagṛiha, Śrāvastī, Sāketa, Kośāmbī and Bārāṇasī which deserve that great honour' [5]. Even as late as the seventh century A. D. Champā was traditionally regarded as the first city of the world [6].

Besides Champā, and Viṭaṅkapura two other cities, Assapuraṁ [7] and Āpanaṁ [8] are said to have belonged to the Aṅgas. They were rich and powerful, and their relations with their western neighbours, the Magadhas, are frequently referred to in Buddhist literature. Thus we learn from Vinaya [9] Piṭaka that the Aṅga-Magadhas supplied food and drink when Uruvela Kassapa performed his great sacrifice. It appears from the Gūtha-Pāṇa-Jātaka [10] that citizens from the kingdoms of Aṅga and Magadha frequently paid visits to each other's country. But the friendly relations were often disturbed by open

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1. cf. Pargiter's article in J. R. A. S. 1908, pp. 309 ff.
2. Quoted in Dr. H. C. Ray Chaudhury's Political History of India (p. 55).
3. I. p. 213 ; IV, p. 252.
4. Digha N. II. p. 235.
5. Ibid p. 169.
6. Watters on Yuan Chwang vol. II. p. 181.
7. Maj. N. II, p. 271.
8. Sam. N. V., p. 225.
9. I., p. 27.
10. Jātaka, II, p. 148.

hostilities. We read in the Campeyya Jātaka [1] that once upon a time Aṅga was king in the kingdom of Aṅga, and Magadha, king in Magadha, and betwixt the two realms was the river Champā. Sometimes king Magadha took the Aṅga country and sometimes king Aṅga took Magadha. As Bimbisāra, king of Magadha, finally annexed Aṅga to his kingdom in the sixth century B. C. the above description of Aṅga apparently refers to an anterior date and the Jātaka story seems to have preserved a reminiscence of the long struggle between Aṅga and Magadha which ended in the triumph of the latter. Thus the *Dulva* states that Brahmadatta king of Aṅga had defeated the father of Bimbisāra[2] and,—apparently in retaliation for this—Bimbisāra attacked and conquered Aṅga. The occasional triumph of Aṅga over Magadha is also corroborated by the Puranic statement that an Aṅga king performed a sacrifice at Mount Vishṇupada at Gayā [3] as well as by an ancient *gāthā* preserved in the Vidhura-Paṇḍita-Jātaka [4]. The city of Rājagṛiha is said in this *gāthā* to have belonged to the king of Aṅga. As Rājagṛiha was the far-famed capital of Magadha, the *gāthā* apparently preserves the reminiscence of a period when Magadha was occupied by the king of Aṅga. The same Jātaka gives another indication of the great extent of the kingdom of Aṅga. We are told of four Brāhmaṇas, who led an ascetic life in the Himalayas, that they dwelt a long time there, feeding on the forest roots and fruits, and then, as they went their rounds to procure salt and sour condiments, came to beg in the city of Kāla-champā in the kingdom of Aṅga. Now it appears from the context that Kāla-champā was close to the Himalayas and consequently we must suppose the kingdom of Aṅga to have extended up to that mountain. The name Kāla-champā was apparently derived from Champā, the name of the capital city, the adjective Kāla (black) being added to distinguish it from the latter. It is not a little significant that the same Jātaka should refer to Rājagṛiha as the city of the Aṅgas and otherwise indicate the extension of the kingdom up to the Himalayas. Apparently the Jātaka preserves the memory of a time when the power of Aṅga was at its height.

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1. IV, p. 281.
2. Duff's chronology, p. 5—6.
3. Vāyu Purāṇa ch. 99, p. 102.
4. Jātaka VI. p. 133.

In addition to Magadha Aṅga had also to carry on a struggle with the powerful kingdom of Kausambi. The Jaina literature refers to an Aṅga king Dadhivāhana "whose daughter Chandanā or Chandravālā was the first female who embraced Jainism shortly after Mahāvīra attained the Kevaliship and afterwards became the head of the thirty-six thousand nuns." This king is said to have been attacked by Śatānīka, king of Kausambi, who advanced as far as Champā. In Priyadarśikā Udayana of Kausambi is said to have restored the Aṅga king Dṛiḍha Varmma to his throne [1]. As Udayana is the successor of Śatānīka according to Pauranic genealogy, the above traditions apparently refer to a struggle between Aṅga and Kausambi for at least two generations. It is not unlikely that it is the struggle with Kausambi which ultimately turned the scale in the fight between Aṅga and Magadha.

Stray references to kings and queens of Aṅga are met with in literature. Thus we meet with the names of king Dhataraṭṭha (Dhṛitarāshṭra) and queen Gaggarā who gave her name to a famous lake in Champā. [2]

No reference to other parts of Bengal, besides Aṅga, has hitherto been traced in the Buddhist Tripiṭakas. But I believe we can find out reference to at least two other tribes of that province. Twice in Saṁyutta Nikāya [3] Buddha is said to have lived at Setaka a town of the Sumbhas. I think the Sumbhas are but a Prākṛitic form of Suhma [4]. Again, a Buddhist teacher, Upasena Vaṅgantaputto, is referred to in Aṅguttara [5] and Viṇaya Piṭaka [6], and on the analogy of such titles as Videhaputta and Mallaputta it is not difficult to recognise in the epithet of Upasena a reference to Vaṅga. Suhma is also referred to as Rāḍha in Buddhist and Jaina literature. But although Suhma and Vaṅga thus seem to have been known, they are never referred to as important states. It seems that these and probably other parts of Bengal were virtually incorporated in the kingdom of

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1. J. A. S. B. 1914, p. 321.
2. Dr. H. C. Roy Choudhury op. cit, p. 55.
3. V. 89, 168—170.
4. Cf. Pischel's Prakrit Grammar, Sec. 267.
5. I. XIV. 3. The passage also refers to one Vaṅgīśo.
6. I. 30.

Aṅga. This would be in full accord with the statement in the Mahābhārata that Aṅga headed the confederacy of Bengal states, and indeed it is difficult to imagine that the Aṅgas had fought with the Magadhas and extended their power up to the Himalayas without first reckoning with the allied and kindred tribes at their back.

In any case it is quite clear from the references in the Puranic, Epic and Buddhist literature, that Aṅga was from the first the most powerful of all the different states into which Bengal was divided, and that it had a great political career for a long period. Its eternal hostility with the Magadhas was the outstanding feature of its history during this period, and the age-long struggle must have brought upon the two combatants strange vicissitudes of fortune. The Magadha supremacy under Jarāsandha was followed by the Aṅga supremacy under Karṇa, and alternate triumphs and reverses of the kind, so characteristically described in the Jātakas, must have taken place in succeeding ages. In the sixth century B. C. the powerful kingdom of Kauśāmbī entered the field against Aṅga, and though the latter carried on a heroic struggle against her two powerful rivals for a long time, she finally succumbed towards the close of that century, and the triumph of Magadha seemed to be complete. Indeed the conquest of Aṅga paved the way for the Imperialism of Magadha. One after another the important states of Northern India had to acknowledge the supremacy of Magadha, and under the powerful Śiśunāga dynasty the imperial banner of Magadha was carried almost from one end of the country to another. Champā, the proud capital of Aṅga became the seat of a Magadhan Viceroy.

But the fall of Aṅga did not mean the fall of Bengal. Towards the close of the fourth century B. C. a very powerful kingdom flourished in lower Bengal. This is referred to by the Greeks as the kingdom of the Gangaridai the fame of whose prowess reached Alexander on the banks of the Beas. The position of the Gangaridai may be ascertained from the data supplied by the Greeks.[1] It was to the east of the Prasii whose capital was at Palibothra. As Palibothra is undoubtedly Pāṭaliputra, Prasii must denote the people of Magadha.

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1. Mc' Crīndle—Megasthenes pp. 33 ff.; Mc' Crindle—Invasion of India by Alexander the Great, pp. 364-5. 221-22, 281-282, 310 Mc' Crindle—Ptolemy—p. 173.

Secondly we learn from Pliny that the final part of the course of the Ganges lay through the country of the Gangaridai, and Diodorus tells us that the Ganges empties its waters into the ocean, forming the eastern boundary of the Gangaridai. As is well-known, the waters of the Ganges fall into the ocean through various streams between the present Hugli and the Padmā rivers, and the latter was undoubtedly the main branch of the Ganges. On the basis of these different data, the Gangaridai must be held to have occupied the country between the eastern boundary of Magadha and the mouth of the Padmā, i e. the ancient Aṅga, Suhma and part of Vaṅga, or roughly speaking, the present Presidency Division, and part of Bhagalpur, Burdwan and Dacca Divisions. The Greek writers speak very highly of the power and prestige of the Gangaridai. Diodorus thus summarises Megasthenes' account. "The Gangaridae possess a vast force of the largest-sized elephants. Owing to this their country has never been conquered by any foreign king; for all other nations dread the overwhelming number and strength of these animals."[1] Diodorus further says that "Alexander, the Makedonian, after conquering all Asia did not make war upon the Gangaridai, as he did on all others, for when he had arrived with all his troops at the river Ganges, and had subdued all the other Indians, he abandoned as hopeless an invasion of the Gangaridai when he learned that they possessed four thousand elephants well trained and equipped for war." This tradition is certainly wrong, for Alexander never reached the Ganges, but it serves to show the high estimation in which the Gangaridai were held by the Greeks. The same conclusion follows from Virgil's Georgics in which the poet pays high tribute to the heroism of the Gangaridai.

If the Gangaridai were so very powerful towards the close of the fourth century B. C., it is clear that they must have established their greatness some time before that. It would appear probable, therefore, that Bimbisāra's victory over Aṅga, and the consequent disruption of the confederacy headed by that state, led to new political combinations and the formation of new political centres. The Gangaridai seem to have even included the people of Kaliṅga, for Pliny names the kingdom as Gangaridæ-Kalinga and describes it in the same way as other writers,—Solin for example,—describe the

1. For a more detailed account of the army of the Gangaridai, cf, the authorities referred to above in fn. (1). p. 9.

Gangaridæ. It must be remembered that according to the Greek writers the Kaliṅgas at this time extended along the coast up to the Bhāgīrathī and thus certainly included the present Midnapur District. It is also quite apparent, from the statement of the Purāṇas quoted above, that the Kaliṅgas were closely allied to the different tribes inhabiting Bengal. Thus Aṅga, Vaṅga, Suhma and Kaliṅga were once more united and it is not impossible that the ramaining tribe, the Puṇḍras also formed part of the confederacy.

V. Smith and, following him, other writers have assumed that the Gangaridai were subordinate to the Prasii. This is certainly not borne out by the Greek accounts. Arrian refers to the two nations and their king in the following terms: "The Gangaridae and the Prasii whose king Agrammes" kept a vast army.[1] Diodorus also speaks about "the Praisioi and the Gandaridai" whose king Xandrames maintained a vast army, but later on he uses only the word Gandaridai to denote the eastern nations and calls Xandrames "the king of the Gandaridai."[2] Plutarch refers to the "kings of the Gandaridai and the Praisiai."[3]

It would thus appear that either the two nations were independent, as Plutarch affirms, or they were under the king of the Gangaridai as Diodorus explicitly states and Arrian evidently implies. This would mean that the victories of Bimbisāra had not finally ended the eternal conflict, and once more Bengal had conquered Magadha. If, as is generally held, Xandrames is but the Greek form of the name of Nanda, it would follow that the Nandas were originally kings of the Gangaridai who had overthrown the Śiśunāga dynasty and conquered Magadha. This view is quite compatible with the Puranic account and would explain the low position assigned to these kings in the Purāṇas if we remember that Bengal was outside the arena of pure Aryan culture.

The Gangaridai existed as an independent power in the second century A. D. Ptolemy says that they occupied all the country about the mouths of the Ganges and that their capital was a town called Ganges.[4] This town cannot be identified but as Ptolemy placed it

1. Mc. Crindle—Invasion nf India by Alexander the Great, p. 221-2.

2. Ibid, pp. 281-282.

3. Ipid. p. 310.

4. Mc. Crindle—Ptolemy—p, 172

about midway between the two extreme mouths of the Ganges it was probably situated in the present Khulna or Jessore District.

Between the time of Alexander when the Gangaridai first come to our view, and that of Ptolemy when we hear last about them, there elapsed a period of about 450 years. The detailed history of Bengal during this period is unknown. The passage from Diodorus quoted above would show that it was independent till at least the time of Megasthenes. Aśoka's expedition to Kaliṅga probably affected the Gangaridai also, as the two occupied contiguous countries and sometimes formed members of the same confederacy. It is not unlikely that the brave resistance put forth by the Kaliṅgas against the resources of the mighty Maurya empire was made possible by the help of the Gangaridai. In any case, it seems almost certain that Kaliṅga and Bengal were both subject to the Maurya empire. It is almost equally certain that both regained their independence after the disruption of that empire in the second century B. C. It appears from the description of Ptolemy that that independence was maintained at least down to the second century A. D. Ptolemy refers to a tribe called *Maroundai* as having occupied the country 'on the left bank of the Ganges, south of the Gogra, down to the top of the delta.' Prof. S. Levi recognises this name in the Chinese *Meou-loun*, the title of the king of a country in India, in an account of a Chinese embassy to Fu-nan (Cambodia) in the third century A. D. S. Levi identifies Greek Maroundai and the Chinese Meou-loun with the Muruṇḍas which are met with in the Purāṇas and epigraphic records, and shows "that the Greek and Chinese accounts are in substantial agreement and are confirmed by the statements in the Jain books which designate the Maruṇḍarāja as ruler of Kānyakubja and as residing in Pāṭaliputra."[1] These Muruṇḍas were a part of the foreign hordes that invaded India in the early centuries of the Christian era and seem to have occupied a part of northern and north-western Bengal, when the Gangaridai were in possession of the southern portion of it.

We learn from the Purāṇas[2] that in the third and early part of the fourth century A. D. western Bengal *i. e.* the portion of it lying to the west of the Ganges and the Bhāgīrathī, formed the kingdom of the Devarakshitas, who occupied the city of Champā and ruled over the Kośalas (*i.e.* south Kośalas), Andhras (the valley of the Godāvarī)

1. Allan—Catalogue of Gupta coins p. XXIX.
2. Pargiter—Dynasties of the Kali Age, pp. 54, 73-74.

[or the Odras in northern Orissa], the Paundras, the Tāmraliptas and some countries on the sea-shore. The Paundras probably lived on both sides of the Ganges, in northern and western Bengal, and it is difficult to say whether all or only a part of them is referred to in the Puranic passage. The Devarakshitas who thus seem to have established a kingdom extending from the bank of the Ganges to that of the Godāvarī are otherwise unknown in history. It may be surmised, however, that they belonged to the kingdom referred to as Devarāshṭra in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta and which was situated in the Vizagapatam district. According to the Purāṇas their kingdom, roughly speaking, included, in addition to Vizagapatam, the Chattisgarh district, part of Chota-Nagpur and the Burdwan and the Bhagalpur divisions.

Eastern Bengal or at least the greater part of it probably remained as an independent kingdom or more properly a confederacy of independent kingdoms till the middle of the fourth century A. D. About this time we hear of a great fight put up by a confederacy of states in Vaṅga against a hero called Chandra who conquered the whole of Northern India from Bengal in the east to Bāhlika beyond the Indus to the west.[1] There is much dispute among historians about the identity of this king Chandra. Some[2] have identified him with Chandra Gupta I or Chandra Gupta II of the Imperial Gupta dynasty while others[3] have identified him with king Chandravarmman of the Susunia inscription. I am inclined to accept this latter hypothesis. It would follow, then, that Chandravarmman, king of Pushkaraṇā in the Jodhpur State, advanced as far as Bengal in course of conquest and met with a stern opposition from the confederacy of Bengal states. Bengal was, however, subjugated and Chandravarmman seems to have ruled over it for some time. My friend Mr. Nalini Kanta Bhattasali has adduced good reasons to show that there was a fort called Chandravarma-koṭ in the neighbourhood of the group of villages called Koṭālipāḍā, in the Faridpur Dt. about the sixth century A. D. It is not impossible that it is the reminiscence of some defensive works undertaken by the great conqueror.[4]

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1. Cf. Meherauli Pillar inscription of Chandra ; Fleet. Gupta Inscriptions, p. 139.
2. E. g. Mr. R. G. Basak in Ind. Ant 1919, pp 98ff.
3. Ep. Ind. Vol. XIII, p. 133 ; Vol. XII, p. 318.
4. Dacca Review Vol. X. 1920-21, Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5.

But Chandravarmman was not destined to enjoy his success for long. The emperor Samudragupta defeated him and his empire fell to pieces. Bengal passed into the hands of the Guptas and the greater part of it was incorporated into their dominions ; but Samataṭā and Ḍavāka *i, e* the eastern and south-eastern parts remained as tributary states.[1]

A glimpse into the history of Bengal during the Gupta period is afforded by the Damodarpur copper plates recently discovered and published by Mr. Radha Govinda Basak.[2] The first two of these inscriptions are dated respectively in 443 and 447 A. D, when Kumāra Gupta I was the emperor and Puṇḍravardhana or Northern Bengal constituted a Bhukti, *i. e.* an administrative unit roughly corresponding to a modern Division, in charge of one Chirātadatta. There were many Vishayas or districts in this Bhukti, and Koṭivarsha vishaya or the present Dinajpur district was in charge of Vetravarman. He was appointed by Chirātadatta and administered the government of the district with the help of a council of four members, namely the president of the town-Guilds, the chief artisan, the chief record-keeper and a merchant.

The third and fourth Damodarpur plates were inscribed during the reign of Budha Gupta, when the Gupta empire was tottering to its fall owing to the invasion of the Hūnas. The changed condition is indicated by the fact that the Governor of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti now assumes the title of Mahārāja. This contrast between the plates of Kumāragupta and Budha Gupta have not hitherto been noticed but I cannot help believing that it indicates a real change in the status of the province of Bengal. The change is analogous to what took place in the Mughal empire after the death of Aurangzeb. The provincial Governors nominally acknowledged the suzerainty of the emperor of Delhi but they were virtually independent. It appears that while the name of the Gupta emperor Budha Gupta was still invoked as the suzerain authority, virtually an independent or semi-independent Government was set up in Bengal about 480 A. D. This view is corroborated by the fact that the

1. Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Fleet, Gupta Inscriptions p.p. 1 ff.

2. Ep. Ind. Vol. XV., 113 ff ; Vol. XVII, p. 193.

coins of Budha Gupta, unlike those of his predecessos, are not found in the eastern provinces.

For more than fifty years this nominal suzerainty of the representatives of the Imperial Gupta line was acknowledged by the Bengal Government, for the fifth Damodarpur plate dated in the year 543 A. D. still invokes as suzerain power a Gupta emperor whose name is lost.. But how shadowy it had already become appears from the fact that Puṇḍravardhana was now governed by Mahārāja-Rājaputra Deva-Bhaṭṭāraka. I think Rājaputra means the son of the local king and not the son of the emperor as has been maintained. For, in the latter case, the name would have ended in Gupta. It would then follow that Bengal, or greater part of it, was under a local king whose son ruled the northern Bengal as a Governor, though they all acknowledged the nominal suzerainty of the Gupta emperor.

This view is supported by the fact that shortly after we find a line of independent rulers of Bengal whose names replaced those of the Gupta emperors in official records. The memory of these independent rulers of Bengal is preserved in four copper plates found in the Faridpur District.[1] We learn from them that Mahārājādhirāja Dharmāditya, Mahārājādhirāja Gopachandra and Mahārājādhirāja Samāchāradeva ruled in Bengal during the second, third and fourth quarters of the sixth century A. D. Thus Bengal which was virtually independent as early as 480 A. D. finally asserted its independence about fifty years later.

Two other provinces of the Gupta empire had been formed into independent kingdoms about the same time as Bengal. These were the Maukhari kingdom in U. P. and the later Gupta kingdom in Bihar. In the absence of any Imperial power, these states were left free to aggrandise themselves at others' expense. Bengal had its due share of fights with its neighbouring states. The Maukhari king Īśāna Varman claims that he caused the Gauḍas, living on the sea-shore, in future to remain within their proper realm.[2] It would follow from this

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1. Ind. Ant., 1910, p. 216. Mr. R. D. Banerji contended that these grants were forged. J. A. S. B., N. S. Vol. VII. pp. 289—308 ; but Pargiter successfully demolished his contention (Ibid pp. 475—502). For further controversy on the subject cf. J. A. S. B., N. S., Vol. X. Dec. and Dacca Review, Vol. X.

2. The Haraha Ins. Ep. Ind. Vol. XIV, p. 110.

that the Gauḍas or the people of Bengal had extended their political influence beyond the province and were thwarted in their ambitious enterprise by the Maukharis. Checked in the west, they probably tried to extend their power in the south and came into conflict with the Chālukyas whose king Kīrttivarman I boasts of having defeated the rulers of Aṅga, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga.[1]

But the failure of the early attempts to extend their power in the west and south did not dishearten the Bengalis. They had consolidated their kingdom and soon there arose a hero who was destined to lead them as victors over the coveted territories.

This hero, the first great national hero of Bengal of whom history has preserved any record, was named Saśāṅka.[2] He extended his dominions from Ganjam in the Madras Presidency to Kanauj in the north-west. Thus not only Magadha, but also the dominions of the late rivals, the Maukharis, were conquered and Bengal was raised from the status of a provincial kingdom to that of an empire.

The sequel of the story is well-known. When Śaśāṅka had defeated and killed the Maukhari king Grahavarmā, he was opposed by Rājya-vardhana, king of Thāneswar and brother of the widowed Maukhari queen Rājyaśrī. But the king of Thāneswar too was defeated and killed. Then Harsha-vardhana, the younger brother and successor of Rājya-vardhana took up the contest. The details of the struggle are

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1. Badami Pillar Inscription. Ind. Ant. Vol. XIX, p. 16.

2. The following are the important references to Śaśāṅka

Inscriptions. (1) Rhotasgadh Inscription. Fleet. Gupta Ins. p. 284.

(2) Ganjam plates. Ep. Ind. Vol. VI., p. 143.

Original *Texts.* Travels of Hiuen Tsang. Beal, Vol. I, p. 210. ff. II, 42, 91, 118, 121. Watters Vol. I. p. 343.

Harsha Charita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa Tr. by Cowell, p. 178 ff.

Modern writers—V. A. Smith. Early History of India (Third Edition) p. 337.

Ettinghausen—Harsha-Vardhana pp. 37, 38.

R. P. Chanda—Gauḍa-Rājamālā—pp. 7 ff.

R. D. Banerji—Bāṅglār Itihās—pp. 78. ff.

Some genealogical books of Bengal refer to Śaśāṅka. But as these have recently been tampered with by some Bengali authors it is difficult to place any reliance on them.

unknown but it is certain that as late as 619 A. D. and probably up to the time of Śaśāṅka's death some years later, he fought on equal terms with Harsha-vardhana and was ruler of considerable territories in northern India and the Madras Presidency.

Bengal thus seems to have been the most powerful kingdom in northern India in the first quarter of the seventh century A. D. But the great king who raised her to this position of glory has not received due recognition from the historians of India. On the other hand his name has been handed down to posterity as that of a foul murderer.

This view rests upon the accounts furnished by Bāṇabhaṭṭa and Hiuen Tsang. Bāṇabhaṭṭa writes that Śaśāṇka induced Rājya-vardhana to visit him at his house and killed him while he was off his guard. Hiuen Tsang says that Śaśāṅka often used to say that "if a frontier country has a virtuous ruler, this is the unhappiness of the (mother) kingdom". On this his ministers asked Rājya-vardhana to a conference and murdered him.

These accounts do not agree with each other and seem to be very improbable. Mr. R. P. Chanda has discussed the points at great length in his Gauḍa-Rājamālā and has ahown good grounds for rejecting them. In the first place it is scarcely possible that Rājya-vardhana should visit the house of his declared enemy without proper defence. Secondly it is apparent from the details furnished in Harsha-charita that Rājya-vardhana had not more than six or seven thousand horsemen under him, whereas Śaśāṅka could not possibly have undertaken such a distant military expedition to Kanauj without a far greater army. The possibility, therefore, is that Rājya-vardhana was defeated in a fair fight and Śaśāṅka subsequently killed his royal captive.

In judging the whole question we must remember two things. First, that the almost contemporary inscription of Harsha-vardhana clearly says that Rājya-vardhana gave up his life in the house of his enemy for the sake of truth and does not allude to treachery having played any part in it. Secondly, we must remember that all our information about Śaśāṅka in this connection is derived from two writers, Bāṇabhaṭṭa and Hiuen Tsang, and both of them belonged to the party of his professed enemies. Bāṇabhaṭṭa was the court-poet of Harsha-vardhana and as such could not take an impartial view of the acts of Śaśāṅka who was a lifelong enemy of his patron king and had defeated and killed his elder brother. Hiuen Tsang's attachment to

Harsha-vardhana is also well known and he had an additional ground for entertaining hostile feelings towards Śaśāṅka ; for the latter was a Śaiva and a determined opponent of Buddhism which was the cherished creed of the Chinese Traveller.

The bias felt by these two writers against Śaśāṅka is evident. Bāṇabhaṭṭa calls him 'Gauḍā-dhama' and 'Gauḍa-bhujaṅga' *i. e.* 'the wretch of Gauḍa', 'the serpent of Gauḍa' etc, and the Chinese Traveller relates that owing to his sins there were sores all over the body of Śaśāṅka and his flesh rotted off before he died.

A careful consideration of all these facts would induce most men to revise the opinion about Śaśāṅka handed down by historians. There is nothing to prove that the career of this great man who raised his mother-land to a pitch of greatness and glory unknown before was blackened by a foul crime He rose from a comparatively low position[1] and fought against enormous odds. The powerful king of Thāneswar was his rival in the contest for supremacy and his eastern neighbour the king of Prāgjyotisha or Assam made a common cause with this rival against him. To meet this combination he allied himself with the king of Malwa, and for long maintained the position of supreme power in Northern India, his dominions stretching from Kanauj to Ganjam at its greatest extent. If we reflect the political condition of Bengal before his time, a dependent state just freed from bondage, we cannot withhold our profound admiration for the heroism and statesmanship of Saśāṅka.

As already remarked above, the details of the struggle between Śaśāṅka and Harsha-vardhana are not known with any degree of certainty. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang seems to imply that Harsha-vardhana brought the whole of Eastern India into subjection within six years of his accession[2] but this statement is undoubtedly wrong. For the Ganjam plates show that Śaśāṅka's sovereignty was acknowledged in that region as late as 619 A. D., and Hiuen Tsang himself tells us elsewhere that Harsha-vardhana personally

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1. An inscription cut in the rock at the hill-fort of Rohṭāsgaḍh records the name of Mahāsāmanta Śaśāṅkadeva and Fleet identifies him with the great king of Bengal.(Gupta Inscriptions, p. 284). It would then follow that Śaśāṅka began his career as a feudal chief.

2. Watters—On Yuan Chwang. Vol. I, p. 343.

led an expedition against that kingdom about 643 A. D.[1] If we add to this that Hiuen Tsang never makes any specific reference to the defeat of Śaśāṅka and the conquest of his country by Harsha-vardhana, we may be tolerably certain that eastern India had not been conquered by the latter till the death of his great rival. In view of Harsha's expedition against Ganjam in 643 A. D., we may assume that his conquering expedition in the east did not probably begin long before 630 A. D.

The death of Śaśāṅka and the expedition of Harsha-vardhana destroyed the Bengal-empire which the former had reared up with so much trouble. Bengal was again divided into a number of small states. From the description of Hiuen Tsang we can form a fair idea of the political divisions of Bengal at this period. Beginning from the west, the pilgrim passed through the following kingdoms:

1. Champā—Bhagalpur district.
2. Kajaṅgala—North-eastern part of the Santhal Parganas, round about Rajmahal.
3. Puṇḍravardhana—Part of Malda, Rajsahi and Bogra districts.
4 Samataṭa—Part of Jessore, Faridpur, Khulna, Backergunge and Tippera districts.
5. Tāmralipti—Part of Midnapur and 24 Parganahs.
6. Karṇa-Suvarṇa—The northern and central part of Burdwan Division and Murshidabad district.

Hiuen Tsang does not give us any definite information about the political status of these kingdoms. As regards Kajaṅgala we are told that lately the king of a border country had deposed its ruler, but the pilgrim is silent about the rest. No doubt Harsha-vardhana carried a military expedition against some of these states and Hiuen Tsang specifically refers to his progress as far as Kajaṅgala and Koṅgoda (Ganjam coast). But Hiuen Tsang never describes these kingdoms as part of Harsha-vardhana's empire. If we remember how Hiuen Tsang specifically refers to many states in north-western India as dependent upon Kapisa and Kashmir, his silence in the case of the different states in Bengal cannot be construed as implying that they were dependent on Harsha. Nor can we infer from his general statement that Harsha-vardhana conquered the Five Indies that all these states were included within the Kanauj empire; for

1. Ibid, p. 349.

Hiuen Tsang refers to independent kings of many states just in the neighbourhood of Kanauj. Lastly the specific statement of Hiuen Tsang that one of the western states of Bengal was under a neighbouring ruler seems to preclude the theory that Harsha-vardhana's rule extended over Bengal. The utmost that can be said is that these states acknowledged a nominal suzerainty of the great emperor.[1]

Thus the net result of the struggle between Harsha and Śaśāṅka was the disruption of the empire and the division of Bengal into a number of small kingdoms after the death of the latter. With the death of Harsha the last vestige of his supremacy over Bengal, if there were any, completely passed away.

The death of Harsha-vardhana left the field free for the ambitious enterprise of his eastern ally Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa. In an inscription recently discovered he is said to have his victorious camp pitched at Karṇa-Suvarṇa.[2] This clearly indicates the conquest of Bengal by the king of Kāmarūpa but it seems to have been a temporary raid and left no permanent result.

During the 100 years that followed the death of Harsha, Eastern India was dominated to a great extent by the rising power of Tibet.[3] Sometime between 581 and 600 A. D. a chief named Loun-tsanso-loung-tsan united the hilly tribes in the north-eastern frontier of India beyond the Himalaya and founded the kingdom of Tibet. His son Srong-btsan-sgam-po was a great conqueror and extended his dominions in all directions. He forced the king of Nepal to give his daughter in marriage to him, and for nearly two hundred years Nepal remained a vassal state to Tibet. He also married a Chinese princess and came to the aid of the Chinese mission led by Wang-hiuen-tse to India when the latter was insulted and plundered by the minister of Harsha-vardhana who had usurped his master's throne.[4] The Tibetan king probably took advantage of this opportunity to extend his

1. Cf. my article 'Harshavardhana—a critical study, in J. B. O. R. S. Vol. IX p. 311.

2. Nidhanpur Copper-plate of Bhāskaravarman ; Ep. Ind., Vol. XII., p. 65.

3. The account of Tibet that follows is taken from Sylvain Levi's Le Nepal Vol. II., pp. 146 ff., 173 ff.

4. V. A. Smith's Early History of India (Third Edition) pp. 353—354 and references quoted in foot-note 1, p. 354.

dominions in India and not only added Assam to his previous conquest of Nepal, but is also said to have been the master of nearly half of India. This is obviously an exaggeration but probably parts of Bengal passed under the yoke of the barbarians. After the death of Srong-btsan-sgam-po (c. 650 A. D.) his grandson K'i-li-pa-pou (650-679) maintained his hold over Indian dominions. But during the troublesome period of minority and regency that followed, China reconquered the provinces lost to Tibet, and while the Tibetan king was busy with China, his Indian provinces revolted. The revolt in Nepal was subdued but it is difficult to say how far the Tibetan king was successful in maintaining his hold over other parts of India.

In any case, we find many independent royal families in Bengal at this time. There was a king of Puṇḍra who is described even by his enemies as skilful in destroying his enemies. He was killed by a chief of the Śaila family who usurped the kingdom. This family which now became master of North Bengal had a remarkable history. According to the Ragholi plates[1] their original home was in the valley of the Himalayas and one of their ancestors Pṛthu-vardhana is said to have attacked the country of the Gurjaras. As these lived in the Panjab and Rajputana it is apparent that the Śaila family originally belonged to the north-western part of India. We further learn from the Ragholi plate that they spread to the east and three branches of the family established themselves at Kāśī, the Vindhya region and northern Bengal. Thus the Śailas played important part in the history of northern India during the latter half of the 7th and the beginning of the 8th century A. D. It is probable that the Saila kings of Puṇḍra or northern Bengal extended their dominions to the west and not only conquered the three small states of Bengal to the west and south of the Ganges but also the kingdom of Magadha.[2]

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1. Ragholi plates of Jayavardhana II, Ep. Ind., Vol. IX. p. 41.

2. This follows from the statement in Gauḍavaho that the king of Gauḍa was the Lord of Magadha. It is generally assumed that the person referred to was a king of the later Gupta dynasty of Magadha. But then the title of the book 'Gauḍa-vaho' shows that in the opinion of its author the person referred to was a Gauḍa king who had conquered Magadha, rather than a Magadha king who had conquered Gauḍa. In any case, the presumption made in the text is not certainly more unreasonable than the current theory which it replaces.

The dynasty of the later Guptas was extinct and the kingdoms of Gauḍa and Magadha were united under one chief.

While the Śailas were thus consolidating and extending the kingdom of Puṇḍra, Samataṭa or southern and eastern Bengal was developing into an important state under a new dynasty known in history as the Khaḍga dynasty. The dynasty which was Buddhist in religion is known to us from two copper plates[1] and an inscription on a metallic image.[2] The copper plates were found at the village of Ashrafpur in the police station of Raipura in the Dacca district. The image was found about 22 miles south of Comilla. These inscriptions give us the names of three kings Khaḍgodyama, Jātakhaḍga and Devakhaḍga. The chief queen of the last, named Prabhāvatī, and his son and heir-apparent Rāja-Rāja-Bhaṭṭa (also called Rājarāja) are also mentioned therein.[3] The first copper plate issued by Devakhaḍga is dated in the year 13. The second issued by Rājarāja is also dated, according to Mr. Laskar who edited it, in the year 13. But the numerals here are quite different from those used in the first and it is impossible to read it as 13. The first figure may be read as 7 and the second, either as 3 or 9; but as it is different from the 'figure for 3' in the first inscription, I read it as 9. The date is thus 79.[4] It is difficult to take '79' as the regnal year and hence we must refer it to the Harsha era which gives us the date 68[5] A. D. This date is supported by a palaeographical

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1. Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1885, pp. 49 ff 1890, p. 242; 1891, p. 119.

Memoirs of the As. Soc. Bengal. Vol I, pp. 85 ff.

2. Dacca Review, 1922, p. 139. I am indebted to Mr. N. K. Bhattasali, Curator, Dacca Museum, who is editing the inscription, for an estampage and a reading of the inscription.

3. The predecessors of Devakhaḍga are refered to in one of the copper-plates and the Image inscription. The former gives the royal title to Jātakhaḍga and the latter to Khaḍgodyama. All the three inscriptions style Devakhaḍga as king. Prabhāvatī is referred to in one of the copper-plates and the Image inscription, while the heir-apparent is mentioned in both the copper-plates, one of them calling him simply, 'Rājarāja' and the other giving the full title 'Rājarājabhaṭṭa'.

4. The date of this inscription has been fully discussed by me in a paper contributed to the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

examination of the copperplates. The characters are similar to, but probably a little earlier than those of the Khālimpur copper-plate of Dharmapāla who ascended the throne less than 100 years after the date proposed.[1] This date is further corroborated by another interesting evidence. According to I-tsing, a Chinese traveller who came to India in the latter half of the seventh century A. D., the reigning king of eastern India was named 'Deva-varmā'. The same writer says that king Ādityasena recently built a temple, and thus Ādityasena and Deva-varmā were contemporaries or very nearly so. Again, when Seng-chi, another Chinese traveller, came to India towards the close of the seventh century A. D. the reigning king of Samataṭa was a Buddhist named Rājabhaṭa.[2] Now according to the date proposed, the Buddhist Rājabhaṭa, son of Devakhaḍga, flourished towards the end of the 7th century A. D., and the find-spots of the inscriptions show that the Khaḍga dynasty ruled over eastern Bengal which was known in old days as Samataṭa. He can thus be easily identified with the Rājabhaṭa king of Samataṭa mentioned by the Chinese. The king Deva-varmā of the Chinese traveller may also be identified with Deva Khaḍga inspite of the difference in the name-endings. For Varmā is a well-known epithet assumed by royal personages and it is not unlikely that the title of Khaḍga was sometimes interchanged with that of Varma. The Rāshṭrakūṭa king Dantidurga, for example, was known also as Dantivarmmā. As a matter of fact the Dūtaka of one of the copperplates issued by Devakhaḍga is named Yajñavarmā, showing that the use of the title had already begun.

Thus the inscriptions and the Chinese evidence taken together testify to the existence of the Khaḍga dynasty in eastern Bengal during the latter half of the seventh century A. D. A name ending in Khaḍga is outlandish and so far as I know, the only other place where it can be traced is Nepal. We are not only familiar with such recent names as Khaḍga Sham Sher, but can trace the existence of a well-known caste called Khaḍgis as early at least as the 14th century A. D.[3] If we remember what has already been said about the relation between Nepal and Tibet and the influence exercised by

1. J. A. S. B. 1921, pp. 1 ff.
2. Chavannes—Memoires Sur les Religieux Eminents pp. 83, 81, 128.
3. Sylvain Levi—Le Nepal Vol. I, p. 228 : Vol. II. pp. 304, 352.

the latter upon the Indian states, it may not be unfair to presume that the Khaḍga dynasty came to eastern Bengal in the train of the Tibetans and the Nepalese during the troublesome days that followed the death of Harsha-vardhana. It is remarkable that both Āditya Sena and Deva Khaḍga assume independence almost about the same time and this is in keeping with the statement in the Chinese history that the Indian states revolted during the last quarter of the seventh century A. D. It is true that the Chinese historians place the date of this revolt after 679 A. D. whereas Āditya Sena and Deva Khaḍga flourished a few years earlier; but as the Chinese had no direct source of information and as there is great discrepancy in chronological matters between the Chinese and Tibetan accounts of those transactions, the difference of these few years may be neglected.

Thus towards the close of the seventh century A. D. Bengal was divided into two important kingdoms, historically known as those of Gauḍa and Vaṅga. Ultimately each of these terms came to denote the whole of the province but in its original application Gauḍa meant the northern and western, and Vaṅga, the southern and eastern Bengal. Throughout the course of history the distinction between Gauḍa and Vaṅga was maintained, although sometime both of them came under a common sceptre and were merged together to form a common state. The ideal of a united Bengal which inspired Śaśāṅka did not fully materialise, but it was realised halfway inasmuch as the numerous petty states into which the country was originally divided gave place to two well-defined states. But the ideal for which Śaśāṅka lived and died henceforth always loomed large before the eyes of the Bengalis and oftentimes they were on the point of realising it in full.

The political equanimity of Bengal was disturbed in the second quarter of the eighth century A. D. by three rude invasions. The first was that of Yaśovarmā, the king of Kanauj. We learn from a Prākṛit poem written by his court-poet Vākpatirāja, that he undertook a *digvijaya* or military expedition in northern India. The title of the book—Gauḍa-Vaho—or the 'slaughter of the king of Gauḍa' shows, however, that the most powerful opponent of Yaśovarmā was the king of Gauḍa. For although the poet describes the discomfiture of many other chiefs in course of Yaśovarmā's campaign, he emphasises that of the Gauḍa king alone in the title of the book; and we are told that when the poem was over, the learned people

of Kanauj preferred a request to the poet to describe in further details the campaigns of Yaśovarmā against the king of Gauḍa.

Vākpati describes the Gauḍa king as the lord of Magadha and that this was no mere empty boast on the part of the Gauḍa king is shown by the fact, recorded by the poet, that Yaśovarmā first confronted his eastern enemy near the Vindhyas. This is easily explained if we remember that a branch of the Saila family which now ruled over northern Bengal had settled itself in the Vindhya region, and the Gauḍa king who added Magadha to his dominions probably made a common cause with his kinsmen in order to oppose the invaders outside the boundary of his dominions.

The Gauḍa king could not maintain his position at this remote frontier and fell back with his army. Somewhere nearer his own kingdom he offered a stubborn resistance to the enemy. His vassals and nobles were "shining like the sparks of light issuing from a shooting star", but although they fought bravely and dyed the battle field crimson with their blood, the day was lost and the king of Gauḍa was slain by Yaśovarmā. The victor next defeated the king of Vaṅga and thus completed the conquest of Bengal. He did not however aim at ruling the country. His conquests achieved, and his nominal suzerainty acknowledged, he turned his back from the country. Even 100 years later, a town called Yaśovarmapura probably served as a reminiscence of his victorious campaign.

But Yaśovarmā was a living example of the proverbial instability of fame and fortune. The proud conquering hero soon suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Lalitāditya of Kashmir.[1] Once his powerful rival was laid low, Lalitāditya emulated his enterprise by undertaking another *digvijaya.* Kalhana who describes the military campaigns of Lalitāditya in rather general terms, vaguely refers to his triumphal progress to the eastern ocean and only makes an indirect allusion to the conquest of Gauḍa.[2] It is not surprising therefore that doubts have been felt regarding the genuineness of the court poet's description of the magnificent conquests of his hero. But that the conquest of Gauḍa was a historical fact is proved by two incidental notices. In the first place Chaṅkuna asked of Lalitāditya "that image of Sugata which was brought on the

1. Rājataraṅgiṇī IV. 144.
2. Ibid, IV. 148.

shoulders of an elephant from Magadha."[1] Evidently he refers to a spoil of conquests. Secondly we have the very interesting story recorded by Kalhana how Lalitāditya invited the king of Gauḍa to his capital and had him killed by assassins though he had made the glorious image of Vishṇu Parihāsakeśava a surety for his guest's safety.[2] It is difficult to believe that the king of Gauḍa would have visited Kashmir, when he evidently suspected foul play, if he were not politically subordinate to its king. The sequel of the story is very interesting and instructive. The followers of the king of Gauḍa, bent on revenge, went to Kashmir, on the pretext of visiting the shrine of the goddess Śāradā, and invested the temple of the God who had been made a surety. "They reached in a vigorous onslaught the silver statue of Vishṇu Rāmasvāmin and mistaking it for that of Parihāsakeśava they overturned it and broke it into dust,—while they were all being cut up by the soldiers who had come from Srinagar the capital of Kashmir". Kalhana pays a well-deserved tribute to the courage and devotion of this small band of Bengali heroes. "What of the long journey which had to be accomplished, and what of the devotion for the dead lord? Even the creator cannot achieve what the Gauḍas did on that occasion. Even to this day the temple of Rāmasvāmin is seen empty, whereas the whole world is filled with the fame of the Gauḍa heroes." It is impossible to doubt the genuineness of this story as it comes from the pen of one who was not only the court-poet of Kashmir but looked upon Lalitāditya as an ideal king. Kalhana would most assuredly never have recorded anything reflecting against Lalitāditya if that were not established on unimpeachable testimony.

Twelve years later, Jayāpīḍa, a grandson of Lalitāditya ascended the throne of Kashmir. Kalhana has recorded a romantic story of his career[3]—how he lived in disguise at the house of a courtesan in Puṇḍravardhana, how his valour displayed in killing a lion with a single stroke led to his discovery, how the king of Gauḍa, named Jayanta, gave his daughter Kalyāṇadevī in marriage to him and how the Kashmirian king defeated the five chiefs of Gauḍa and made his father-in-law their sole sovereign. It is difficult to say what

1. Ibid IV. 259
2. Ibid IV. 323 ff.
3. Ibid IV. 421 ff.

amount of truth there is in this romantic story. The probability is that Gauḍa had thrown off the yoke of Kashmir immediately after the death of Lalītāditya, and a friendship, cemented by marriage alliance, was established between the two countries.

In addition to the invasions from Kanauj and Kashmir, Bengal also suffered about this time from the raids of its eastern neighbour the king of Assam. In an inscription[1] dated 759 A. D. Harsha of the Bhagadatta dynasty is styled as lord of Gauḍa, Oḍra, Kaliṅga and Kośala. The kings of Assam belonged traditionally to the Bhagadatta dynasty[2] and it is probable therefore that Harsha was originally a king of that country. It would thus follow that sometime before 759 A. D. he had led a successful campaign against Bengal.

These constant foreign invasions destroyed the political equilibrium of Bengal and the country was reduced to a chaotic condition. The reference in Rājataraṅgiṇī that Jayanta defeated the five chiefs of Gauḍa is an indication of the political disintegration that had taken place. The following vivid description of the condition of Bengal by Lama Taranath was not probably very far from truth. "In Oḍivisa, in Bengal and the other five provinces of the east, each Kshatriya Brahman and merchant constituted himself a king of his surroundings, but there was no king ruling the country."[3] This is corroborated by the Khalimpur Inscription in which the political condition of Bengal about this time is described as a 'Mātsya-nyāya.'[4] This is a technical term used by ancient writers to denote a period of anarchy and confusion in which might is right and the strong oppress the weak, even as bigger fish swallow the smaller ones in a pond. But the evil brought its own remedy. The Khalimpur inscription tells us that unable to bear the miseries any longer, the people elected Gopāla as their ruler and he ushered in a new era of progress and prosperity for Bengal. The history of Bengal enters a new phase under the Pāla dynasty and requires an altogether different treatment. We may therefore close here the early history of Bengal.[5]

1. Paśupati Inscription of Jayadeva. Ind. Ant., Vol. IX, p. 178.
2. Harsha Charita. Tr. Cowell and Thomas, p. 217.
3. Ind. Ant., Vol. IV, pp. 365-366.
4. Khalimpur Copperplate of Dharmapāla, verse 4, Ep. Ind. Vol. IV, p. 243.
5. Nothing has been said in this paper about the colonisation of Ceylon by the Bengalis. This topic, along with other questions of a similar nature will be dealt with in a separate paper.

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